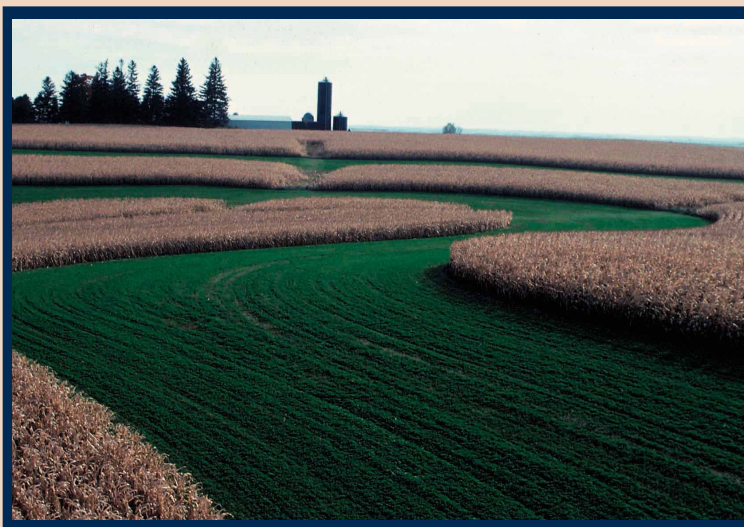


Resource Assessment



and

Trends



in the Midwest Region

March 2001

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Foreword

This report has been prepared by Natural Resources Conservation Service as both a resource document and educational tool. It has been produced to convey information about the condition of natural resources on private lands, agricultural production, and producers in the Midwest Region. The report identifies changes and trends that may impact critical conservation issues in the near future.

The findings and predictions are stated in the three chapters:

Strategic Trends in the Midwest Region;

Natural Resource Issues in the Midwest Region; and

Basins of National Importance in the Midwest Region.

Healthy natural resources are critical to support the lives of over 57 million people who live in the Midwest Region.

I am very pleased to present the information you will find in this report, “Resource Assessment and Trends of the Midwest Region.” This report has been prepared as a resource document and educational tool. It conveys information about the condition of the natural resources on private lands and about agriculture in the Midwest Region.

The primary business of Natural Resources Conservation Service is providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers that own and/or operate businesses that have an impact upon the natural resources. Our workforce consists of both paid employees and non-paid volunteers, all of whom are dedicated to conserving the natural resources of our great country.

We have invested in building an infrastructure that moves people to understand natural resources and then to want to voluntarily participate in conservation efforts. Our offering of technical assistance is made through our locally-led conservation delivery system, available in every county to individuals, tribal and other governments, and organizations.

I hope that you find the information in this report to be useful. We would appreciate your comments so that we can continue to provide you with the information that you need to make the right decisions about natural resources.



Charles Whitmore
Regional Conservationist
Midwest Region
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Introduction to the Midwest Region

The Midwestern United States is called the “Cornerstone of American Agriculture.” The Midwest Region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. These eight states encompass about 458,000 square miles. The population in the region is over 57 million, of which 72 percent is considered urban and 28 percent is rural. The landscape, natural resources, and human population of the region are as diverse as any other region in the United States.

The region’s landscape varies from its rich cropland to its productive hardwood forests, valuable wetlands, grazing lands, lakes and rivers. Annual rainfall varies from 20 inches in Minnesota to 50 inches in Missouri. This varied landscape and climate supports a diversity of ecosystems. Agricultural land in the region supports production of crops and livestock. The region accounts for large portions of the nation’s agricultural production.

- 66 percent of corn production
- 70 percent of soybean production
- 25 percent of hay acreage
- 12 percent of vegetable crop production
- 59 percent of swine inventory
- 34 percent of dairy cattle inventory
- 16 percent of poultry production

Because land and water sustain our region’s agricultural bounty and economic strength, they must be treated as valuable commodities. Healthy soils, clean air and water, abundant wildlife habitat, and scenic landscapes are important environmental commodities that provide significant benefits to society. These public benefits are gained as a result of private landowners engaging in a cooperative effort to practice good stewardship and to use their land according to its capabilities.

The USDA NRCS mission encompasses total resource protection: *helping people to conserve all natural resources on private lands*. This mission is accomplished in the region through hundreds of local soil and water conservation districts, as well as many other organizations.



The eight states in the Midwest Region encompass about 458,000 square miles with a total population over 57 million people.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Who We Are, What We Do

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), was created in 1935 to help farmers and ranchers care for privately owned land. The Soil Conservation Act of 1935 charged SCS to deliver conservation assistance to farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners. This act put in place a remarkable federal, state, and local government partnership for delivering conservation assistance. This partnership still exists and functions today with NRCS and state and local conservation districts working together to address local natural resource priorities.

The strength of NRCS is in its workforce. Most of its employees serve in USDA's network of local,

county-based offices. The rest are at state, regional, and national offices, providing technology, policy, and administrative support.

NRCS employees have the technical expertise and field experience to help land users solve their natural resource challenges and maintain and improve their economic viability. Nearly three-fourths of the technical assistance provided by the agency goes to helping farmers and ranchers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land and individual ways of doing business. The agency also provides assistance to rural and urban communities to reduce erosion, conserve water, and solve other resource problems.

NRCS employees are committed to working with private landowners and managers to assess the state of their land and protect its values.

The public financial commitment to conservation assistance has diminished measurably since the 1930s. In 1937, Congress appropriated \$440 million in financial assistance through a new Agriculture Conservation Program and \$23 million in technical assistance through SCS for conservation. Today, we would spend nearly \$5 billion (current dollars) to share the cost of conservation, if we were to match the 1937 spending level.

NRCS provides assistance to private landowners to help them protect natural resources.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) - provides technical assistance to land users, communities, and units of government in planning and installing practices. The purpose of the systems are to reduce erosion, improve soil and water quality, improve conservation wetlands, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, improve air quality, improve pasture and range condition, reduce upstream flooding, and improve woodlands.



Support for Natural Resource Conservation on the Land

The NRCS organization in the Midwest Region consists of a Regional Office located in Madison, Wisconsin; eight state offices; and 652 field offices. All offices work with state, tribal, and local conservation partners and other natural resource agencies.

Field Offices

There are 652 field offices in the Midwest Region. Each field office is under the direction and supervision of a district conservationist/team leader who is responsible for NRCS activities in the geographical area served by the field office. The office boundary may include one or more conservation districts and one or more counties. Field offices are generally collocated in USDA Service Centers.

State Offices

There are eight state offices in the region, one in each state. Each state office is under the direction and supervision of a State Conservationist, who is responsible for NRCS programs in his or her state. The state office staffs include technical experts and an administrative support unit. Their purpose is to support the field level in the accomplishment of their work.

Regional Office

The Regional Office is under the direction and supervision of a Regional Conservationist. The Regional Conservationist is an extension of the Chief of the Agency and is responsible for:

1. Providing agency leadership, guidance, coordination, and partnering for solutions to regional resource issues;
2. Program implementation, consistency, and accountability;
3. Regionwide strategic planning, performance measurement, and operations management;
4. Administrative operations and support;
5. Fund integrity and accountability;
6. Technical quality of work; and
7. All NRCS activities in the region.



For information on conservation and programs in the Midwest Region, see the Midwest Regional Office web site at:

www.mw.nrcs.usda.gov